

**HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD
STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION**

Property Address:	1429 W Street NW	X	Agenda
Landmark/District:	U Street Historic District		Consent Calendar
Meeting Date:	September 18, 2014		Concept Review
H.P.A. Number:	14-641	X	Alteration
Staff Reviewer:	Anne Brockett		New Construction

Owner Matcap, LLC, represented by David Morris of Trout Design, seeks conceptual review to construct a rear and partial roof addition, infill a side court, and add a roof deck at this house in the U Street Historic District. The house is one of a pair constructed in the 1870s or early 1880s, as evidenced by the elongated window and door openings and their projecting brick hoods. The twin houses are mirror images of each other with three bays, a projecting brick cornice, and a 2-foot gap along the outer side property lines. The rear of the house is visible from Florida Avenue through an alley, which aligns with the rear of the property.

Project Description

The project seeks to enlarge this modest home by expanding upwards, to the rear, and along the side, where the building is set back about 2 feet from the property line. The additions would necessitate demolition of the side wall on both floors and within a newly dug basement; demolition of the front wall below grade for basement windows and a window well; and nearly complete demolition of the rear ell. Because the side wall is proposed to move slightly and interior stairs, walls, and fixtures are being removed, it is likely that considerable structural demolition will be necessary, although no demolition plans were included.

The rear ell would essentially maintain its form on the first and second floors with an extension to the rear that measures 10'7" deep and 10' wide. The addition carries upward to a new third floor, also 10' wide on top of the ell and extending the full width of the building where it sits on the extension to the main block. Although the third floor would sit behind this original block, a roof deck would extend onto the main roof.

The rear ell is currently clad in brick where it meets the main block of the house and stucco and T-111 towards the alley, where it was extended in the 1970s or 1980s. Materials proposed include brick for the first and second stories of the ell and fiber cement siding for the rear and roof additions as well as the new rear wall of the main block. A flight of steps leads down from the parking pad to a subterranean passage covered by a trellis to provide entry to the basement unit, which is fully below grade. A front window well projecting out 18 inches and occupying the full width of the bay is proposed in the front yard to provide light to the new basement unit.

Evaluation

Cumulatively, the extent of the proposed demolition and alteration is simply too much for this small residence. The additions would demolish a substantial portion of the exterior walls and probably most of the interior structure. The side wall demolition, in particular, does not appear to gain much in terms of interior space, yet removes much of the historic fabric and will result in an altered appearance of the façade. The façade will grow in width, affecting the building's symmetry and proportions. The setback of the side infill piece, although increased from about 8 inches to 3 feet is still too shallow to retain the building's original identity as one of a pair of buildings, both with side yard courts.

While the Board has allowed side infill construction in historic districts, it has often required that the new construction be set back to the rear of the main block. Because of the narrow width of the side court here, such an extensive setback is not necessary, but a much more substantial setback than the three feet proposed is needed, and the plan should be modified to retain a majority of the side wall.

On the front, the proposal for a window well also warrants consideration. While the 18" projection is minimal, it should be considered in relation to the miniscule front yard. Generally, when window wells have been found compatible by the Board, it has been where the depth of the front yard allows the change without much visual intrusion. A window well in this location may be compatible if there is no railing placed around the well, its retaining walls are built flush with the existing grade, the new basement windows align with the two above, and the width is reduced to occupy as little of the front yard as possible.

A roof addition may also be possible if the designs are modified. The addition is appropriately set back to the rear of the existing main block, but extends the full three stories at its deepest point in the rear yard. The Board has typically requested that additional stories be set back from the rear wall. While the buildings that flank this pair were built at three stories, the addition should nonetheless be set back so as not to overwhelm the historic alleyscape with new construction, particularly in regard to the twin house next door. In addition, the rear of the house is visible from Florida Avenue and setting the third floor back will help maintain some sense of the house's historic scale from this viewpoint.

Alternative fenestration treatment and cladding materials could also help address the issue of scale. The proposed windows are vertical in orientation, increasing the perception of height. And although the windows have already been revised to be more compatible, they would benefit from further refinement. Similarly, the materials could be better applied to break down the height of the building, perhaps with brick on the lower floors and fiber cement above, or the application of a water table or other horizontal trim.

Restorative façade work, such as the replacement of the incompatible front door and restoration of the full height of the door and transom, installation of 2/2 wood windows, and replacement of the missing metal corner plate at the cornice edge, should be considered.

As plans develop, the staff also seeks confirmation via a mockup that the deck railing and addition will not be visible from further east on W Street and a plan for installing meters in an inconspicuous (i.e. interior) location.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Board find this concept incompatible with the character of the historic district and inconsistent with the purposes of the preservation act, and direct the applicant to continue design work to accomplish the following:

- *Limit the amount of demolition*
- *Increase the setback of the side addition*
- *Set back the third floor at the rear*
- *Increase the compatibility of the rear elevation through materials and fenestration*
- *Construct a mockup on the roof for HPO review.*

The HPO further recommends the project return to the Board for further review when appropriate.